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SUBJECT: DUBAI PROCESS: SLOW AND STEADY COOPERATION BETWEEN
AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

REF: Kabul 3814

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The sixth round of the Canadian-led Dubai Process meeting brought together Afghan and Pakistani technical level delegates to discuss cooperation on counter narcotics, law enforcement, customs and movement of people. Discussions focused mostly on updates and fine-tuning of existing projects, although the two countries progressed on a cooperative framework for quarterly meetings between civilian border authorities. Major donor projects underway to support the Dubai process include UNODC's pilot program on border liaison offices, IOM's biometric program for pedestrians at the Torkham Gate border crossing and USAID's Trade and Accession Facilitation for Afghanistan program to support custom's capacity building. Unresolved disputes from the APTTA negotiations, which were held the two days prior to the Dubai meetings, crept into the discussions, but the Canadian chair was able to bring the delegates back on track. Ultimately, Dubai's success springs from its conception as an informal, working level and apolitical discussion. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The Canadian-led Dubai Process meeting took place in Kabul, November 24-25, 2009, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with meetings of four working groups: Counter Narcotics, Law Enforcement, Customs and Movement of People. In addition to the Afghan and Pakistan Delegations, representatives from the World Bank, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the U.K. Embassy, and the U.S. Embassies in Kabul and Islamabad participated. The next meeting of the Dubai Process will take place with a high-level meeting in the first quarter of 2010.

COUNTER NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

¶3. (SBU) In the Counter Narcotics (CN) and Law Enforcement (LE) working groups, UNODC representatives from both sides of the border briefed on their efforts to encourage cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan and on the desire to establish a narcotics border liaison office (BLO) at Torkham Gate. In addition, on counter narcotics, UNODC will help the Afghans and Pakistanis develop information exchange mechanisms, engage in joint exercises, and combat shipments of precursors. On law enforcement, UNODC will help create real-time information exchanges, set up joint training, and design procedures for cooperation. UNODC is also looking at training and equipping for precursor and drug smuggling detection. NOTE: Embassy Kabul CN and LE agencies and sections will meet with UNODC to ensure clarity and coordination. End note.

¶4. (SBU) Although the Afghans, with the help of the UNODC, had prepared a draft MOU specifying cooperation in these two areas, the Pakistanis proposed that the 2004 MOU signed by both Ministers of Interior would be a sufficient framework for specific cooperation in CN and LE. The Afghans agreed to review the 2004 MOU to see if, in their opinion, it could serve as a framework.

¶5. (SBU) The two delegations also agreed to seek more frequent

interaction by local civil administration officials deployed in border areas for information exchange and joint activities. The GOP team mentioned its successful model with Iran under which civilian border authorities meet on a quarterly basis to discuss problems and successful resolutions of issues.

CUSTOMS: STRENGTHENING BORDER MONITORING THROUGH
INFRASTRUCTURE, TRAINING AND IMPROVED COORDINATION

16. (SBU) Embassy Kabul's Border Management Task Force (BMTF) briefed the group on the status of property acquisition at the Weesh-Chaman border crossing. After some confusion about the location and amount of land needed to construct the customs site, agreement was reached on both the location and amount of land. Next step: President Karzai must issue a decree transferring the land from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Finance. Contacts at the MOF expect the decree will be made in January 2010. Embassy Kabul's BMTF representative also quickly updated the group on progress on the Afghan National Customs Academy. Although this is a strictly Afghan-only institution, it sparked discussion about joint training ventures between the Pakistani and Afghan Customs agencies.

17. (SBU) The Pakistani delegation previously presented the Afghans with a draft bilateral customs agreement. However, both delegations agreed to await the conclusion of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) before moving forward with the bilateral customs agreement. In the meantime they will review the World Customs Organization's template for bilateral customs agreements provided by the World Bank.

AFGHAN CUSTOMS SEEKING STREAMLINING OF PROCEDURES

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AND ANTI-CORRUPTION CAPACITY BUILDING

18. (SBU) USAID explained its Trade and Accession Facilitation Afghanistan (TAFA) program's three elements: trade policy liberalization, trade facilitation and customs reform, and public outreach on trade issues. Both delegations requested education seminars for traders, brokers, and businessmen, including an overview of Afghanistan-Pakistan procedures, laws and regulations, and how-to's on compliance. The Pakistani delegation believed it necessary to find ways to bridge the language barriers among the Dari, Pashto, Urdu and English speaking stakeholders.

19. (SBU) In a separate conversation on the margins of the conference, high-level Afghan Customs officials requested that TAFA technical advisors devise ways to streamline trade documentation, such as electronic forms, creating a database and improving Custom's staff processing skills. They strongly requested TAFA focus on stemming corruption in the Customs authority by developing an anti-corruption strategy, a work plan for its implementation, along with assistance for monitoring and reporting.

MOVING PEOPLE WITH BIOMETRICS

10. (SBU) Under the Dubai Process, IOM has been charged with assessing biometrics capacity and needs on the Afghan side and reviewing the current biometrics system in place in Pakistan. The Afghan assessment is being finalized, and the IOM has begun the review of Pakistan system. IOM emphasized the need for compatibility between the two systems. The pilot biometrics operation, still in the design phase, is slated to be conducted at the Torkham Gate Border Crossing Point which has pedestrian traffic of approximately 24,000 people daily. Under IOM's program, day travelers would be provided with biometric ID cards. Afghanistan would like the pilot project to also include commercial trucker traffic as a test group. ID and Passport reader equipment would be provided as part of the pilot project. Canada announced it would fund two Afghan and two Pakistani Customs officials to attend an IOM biometrics training in Bangkok in January 2010. In addition, Canada is considering funding participation of up to five or six participants from each country.

APTTA AND DUBAI CROSSOVERS INEVITABLE
BUT NOT ALWAYS PRODUCTIVE

11. (SBU) Frequently the meetings were sidetracked by arguments between both sides over the name for the territorial division between Afghanistan and Pakistan, i.e. the "Durand Line" or "border," respectively. Since the Afghans don't recognize this as a "border" they insist on using the term, "legal crossing point," while the Pakistanis insist on using the term, "border crossing points." This issue is one of the sticking points in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) negotiations, the last round of which occurred the two days immediately preceding the Dubai Process negotiations. There is some overlap between the countries' negotiating teams and some language used in the technical level Dubai Process had migrated to the APTTA discussions, much to the dismay of the GOP. Both delegations also raised repeatedly the APTTA "re-export" study which will look at cross border trade which evades appropriate customs duties in either or both countries. The Canadian chair brought the delegations back into line and remonstrated against trying to refight APTTA in the Dubai Process.

12. (SBU) Comment: The Dubai Process has produced results thus far because it is informal, at the working level and apolitical, according to our Canadian interlocutor. With this round immediately following the APTTA negotiating round, some of the APTTA politics crept into discussion, forcing the Canadians to tamp down heightened sensitivities. She said however, the Canadians accompanying the process were divided on whether there was slow and steady progress at this round or simply status quo but with relationship building.
End Comment.

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